

Defining College Readiness

Washington Learns K-12 and Higher Education Advisory Committees The Evergreen State College – September 14, 2005

1. Briefly describe your program

The HECB College Readiness initiative is aimed at improving student transitions from high school to college or the workplace. The board's 2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education calls for the state to define college and workplace readiness in math, science, English, social studies, world languages, and the arts. The 2005-07 state operating budget includes \$600,000 for the HECB to develop definitions in English and science.

A. *What will be done?*

In defining college and workplace readiness in English and science, the board seeks to:

- Define what students must know and be able to do to succeed in entry-level coursework, without remediation, in two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and technical schools.
- Propose definitions that apply to academic *and* job training programs, which increasingly require students to achieve a higher level of skills to prepare for additional training and high-wage jobs and careers.
- Align requirements for college success with the learning outcomes emphasized in K-12 reform.
- Adopt definitions in December 2006, to be used by K-12, higher education institutions, and employers to improve student transitions to postsecondary education and/or the workplace.

B. *How will it be done?*

In collaboration with K-12, higher education, and business:

1. Project coordination team of stakeholders.
2. Faculty development teams – one for English and one for science.
3. Expert review teams to comment on and make recommendations in summer of 2006 regarding definitions developed by the faculty teams.
4. External consultants to help establish a baseline, i.e., review and analyze existing college readiness efforts by states and national organizations.

2. What has facilitated program development and implementation?

- Legislature and governor earmarked \$600,000 in the 2005-07 operating budget.
- Transition Math Project proceeding.
- Other states and national organizations have made progress in defining competency-based readiness standards or criteria.

3. Describe barriers to program development and implementation.

- A lack of clarity on the purpose of a high school diploma in Washington state. One key question: If a diploma does not indicate that a student is ready to perform college work or to move into a relatively skilled job, what does it mean?
- Misalignment between K-12 graduation requirements and college admission standards and academic demands.
- Relatively little has been done in Washington and nationally to determine college readiness in science.

4. What evidence of effectiveness or measures of success can you provide?

- *Transition Math Project*: With funding from the state and the Gates Foundation, project participants have developed college and workplace readiness standards through a rigorous engagement of K-12, and two- and four-year college and faculty and staff. (Expected to be submitted for consideration to HECB by December 2005.)
- *American Diploma Project*: This partnership of Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and the Fordham Foundation, published detailed English and mathematics benchmarks in 2004. Twenty-one states are attempting to align K-12 graduation standards with the knowledge and skills required for success after high school.
- *Standards for Success*: Founding partners, including the Association of American Universities and The Pew Charitable Trusts, developed *Knowledge and Skills for University Success*, which describes the skills and knowledge students need succeed in entry-level university courses. The project addresses English, mathematics, natural and social sciences, languages and the arts.

5. What policies would you recommend to make the program more accessible and productive across the state?

- Advancing the K-12 assessment system beyond WASL, so that the tests students take in high school can serve as readiness tests for college and work.
- Requiring a curriculum that will enable students to succeed in college or the workplace without the need for remedial instruction.
- Linking higher education intimately with K-12 by rewarding students who attain college readiness with preference in college admissions and placement.
- Taking stock of “system readiness.” In other words, *Is the state prepared to teach to and competency-based standards in a technology-driven global economy? If not, what will it take to get there?*

6. What does this cost and how would you fund it?

- The 2005-07 operating budget includes \$600,000 to develop definitions in English and science.
- A more important question is, *How much will it cost to implement college readiness definitions, which will require close synchronization between K-12 and higher education?*